

**Testimony by Marcia DuFore
On behalf of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board
Before the Appropriations Committee**

IN OPPOSITION TO:

**H.B. No. 6846 An Act Implementation the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Human
Services Programs
February 27, 2015**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker and distinguished Senators and Representatives of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Marcia DuFore and I am a registered voter in the town of Suffield, Connecticut. I am writing to you as the Executive Director of the North Central Regional Mental Health Board (NCRMHB) and as an active member of the Keep the Promise Coalition.

I am writing to express our Board's opposition to some of the proposed cuts to the Department of Social Service budget as detailed in HB 6846, An Act Concerning the Governor's Budget Recommendations for Human Services Program.

Our Board's responsibility is to study the mental health needs of people in our region and assist the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) with setting priorities for improved and expanded services to meet those needs. Our constituents include people who use mental health and addiction services, their families and concerned citizens in the towns and cities where services are delivered. Many of our constituents live in poverty and rely of the programs being considered for their health and sustenance.

Our concerns for this legislative session are threefold: to protect individual liberties, preserve the safety net, and promote access to the services and supports necessary for people to lead lives in recovery from mental health and addiction challenges.

Several of the proposed cuts in the Governor's budget threaten the safety net for our constituents and their access to necessary services and supports.

A large percentage of our constituents are unemployed and rely on Social Security disability benefits for their sustenance. The Governor's budget takes away any Cost of Living (COLA) increases allocated to these individuals by the federal government in 2016 and 2017 so that the state of Connecticut can use them instead to address our budget deficit. Currently the maximum allotment for a single person who receives Social Security Income (SSI) is \$733 per month – providing them with an annual income of \$8804.83. I challenge any of us to consider living on that little income, for even one month. In 2015 the COLA increase for people on SSI

was 1.7%. A similar increase in 2016 would bring in \$12.46 per SSI recipient to the state of Connecticut for a savings in 2016 of approximately \$1,000,000. But at what cost and to who?

We are also concerned about the proposal to cut Medicaid provider rates by \$107.5 million in 2016 and \$117.5 in 2017. We understand that the details about where those cuts will be made are to be determined by the Department of Social Services, so we cannot know at this time what the impact will be for our constituents. We do know that access to one of the most commonly used behavioral health services – outpatient therapy is already severely threatened in the underfunded environment that exists today. For the first time behavioral health providers in Region IV are projecting reduced capacity to serve the number of people coming for outpatient care. Funding is already inadequate to serve the individuals and families who need them. The stability of our service system is at risk. We ask you to protect these rates in order to protect our constituents' access to care.

You have much to consider with this budget. We will leave you with these two pressing concerns for our constituents.